Digital Storytelling, podcasts blogs, and vlogs: exploring a range of new media texts and forms in English

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Abstract:

> Curriculum initiatives in Australia emphasise the use of technologies and new media in classrooms. Some English teachers might fear this deployment of technologies because we are not all 'digital natives' like our students. If we embrace new media forms such as podcasts, blogs, vodcasts, and digital stories, a whole new world of possibilities open up for literary response and recreative texts, with new audiences and publication spaces. This article encourages English teachers to embrace these new digital forms and how shows we can go about it.

In this paper I argue that English teachers can get past resistance and technophobia if we can see 'digital native' students not as group to be feared but as one of our greatest resources in the classroom. If we embrace new media technologies as current curriculum initiatives suggest we do, we can open up potential for online publication spaces and possibilities for composition and response afforded by digital texts for authentic audiences. I explore what digital storytelling is and where it is already happening. I will argue why we need to incorporate multimediated and other digital multimodal texts, such as blogs and wikis in our English programs and how we can make these texts work with our students.

Our students as digital natives and teachers as digital 'travellers': getting beyond technophobia.

The term 'digital native' comes from Prensky's work (Prensky, 2007). Some students who could be defined as 'digital natives' do sometimes know more than we teachers do about technology, at least as 'end users' or 'produsers'(Bruns, 2008). Perhaps we need to recoin Prensky's terms 'digital natives' and 'immigrants' to better describe the spectrum of participants in digital culture. One the one hand we can have digital natives, but the rest of us could be digital 'immigrants' (Prensky 2007), asylum seekers, or perhaps travellers, who dip into cyberspace for work, fun or a combination of these reasons. There's no doubt that technology moves fast and can be alienating, but teachers can find a way into new media technologies. The best way to do this is to seek help from our more media-savvy students. Anecdotally there is an underlying fear on the part of some teachers that our students know more than us about technology. This teacher technophobia creates resistance to taking up new media forms and ways of 'doing things with texts', such as digital storytelling. But what we

can bring to the teaching table is our knowledge of semiotics, of narrative structure, visual grammars and command of storytelling devices and techniques which apply in digital stories as much as in printed stories. This valuable knowledge is not always part of our students' skill repertoires, even if they know more than we do about manipulating the technology.

Digital storytelling synthesises the skills and texts that young people are familiar with and adept at using. Many of our students take for granted that technology is part of an increasingly 'connected world'. At home they may be engaging in social networking sites such as 'Facebook,' or 'My Space', which afford opportunities to engage in the oldest form of storytelling- gossip between friends. These provide sites for people to invite 'friends' to interact with them online. We do our students a disservice if we don't deploy skills they are already familiar with and comfortable using. There are more expansive activities happening online than friendship-driven social networking sites, as Mizuko Ito notes in her three year ethnographic work:

> In contrast to the friendship-driven mode that you see in sites like 'MySpace', we've also seen a large number of kids who engage in what we call interest driven learning and participation. This is not about popularity, flirting and mainstream status, but is more about the lives of the geeks, freaks, artists, musicians, and dorks - the kids who are identified as smart or creative, the kids we see at the margins of teen social worlds. This is about kids with passionate interests and serious hobbies finding peers online and mobilizing around their interests (Ito, 2008).

For some students, such as those Ito describes, these sites offer creative spaces for participatory culture and learning. In terms of creativity, what many young people are already doing online is far in advance of what many of us are making available as options in schools.

One group of college students responded to the outmoded way in which information is presented in US universities by making a video entitled, 'Digital students @ analogue schools' (Torres, 2007). The video is available for viewing on 'Teacher Tube' and discusses how 'digital natives' are left unstimulated by print based 'skills sets' and text-only 'Power point' presentations. They argue in their documentary (narrowcast on Teacher tube) that this outmoded approach will not prepare them for a creative workforce; which will emphasise design and creativity over regurgitation of facts and predetermined skill-sets. The vodcast demonstrates just one example of the narrowcast DIY culture called 'produsage' (Bruns,

2008), which refers to the ways in which young people in particular use online technologies to create and produce their own work using the web.

Not all of us teaching English are technological asylum seekers, but both policy briefs and research like Ito's (2008) on pedagogical applications of online practice, indicate that we could be encouraging our students to engage in and develop informed and critical skills to sift through the plethora of virtual worlds available to them outside of school hours. To do this we also need to become *au fait* with the technologies ourselves.

If we want to be 'digital travellers,' we can learn to use the technologies along with our students. There is so much online help that comes with pre-packaged computer software and free downloadable programs, that it's not difficult to self-teach. Teachers can also be part of and exploit current DIY culture. In my media teaching experience, whenever I teach students the basics of digital programs and set structured tasks, they will run with it. They learn the program *whilst* creating the story. For instance one of my mature aged students responding to the short story 'Stolen Car,' (Weller, 1986) in the form of a spoken poem with visuals and musical soundtrack, as a digital story, taught himself the program movie, as this came already loaded onto his Mac. Although not a 'digital native,' the inspiration to create a digital story in response to literature, became the vehicle for his mastery of the software program and the new narrative form.

Another argument I have heard militating against our possible forays into digital worlds is that English teachers are the last ones to get access to computer labs in schools. Since funding of public schools over the last decade has declined, one can only hope that the new federal government's promised investment in technologies will pave the way for new kinds of access for our teachers and students. We have to get beyond all of this fear if we want to serve our students well and we have to claim a legitimate space to use the technology resources in schools.

Views of literacy and technology

Is out fear due to the way that technology is widely perceived? This brings me to some theories around literacy and technology which provide some explanations about what is actually happening in these digital spaces. Two theories dominate much of the debate around technology and literacy: Technological Determinism and Social Determinism. Technological Determinism purports that, 'qualities in the technology are responsible for changes in social

relationships for instance that: Web 2.0 has changed the way we perceive the world..... Or 'the web democratises the availability of information' or 'computers enhance students' learning' (I. Snyder, 2008, p. 161). Social determinism takes an opposing view that users have the power and control over the technology. In other words, 'people, not technology, were portrayed as responsible for the phenomenon of digital democracy'(I. Snyder, 2008, p. 162).

Perhaps more ubiquitous and pernicious is the ever-present, highly-funded 'protectionist,' agenda which is premised on the notion that 'the media makes us do (dangerous) things.' . There is not much substantive evidence of this 'negative' influence in spite of extensive research dollars invested in it. This in part sets up resistance from parents and governing authorities to create policy around the use of social networking sites. Impact on public perception has probably been influenced by skewed media reportage. The recent American teen suicide as a result of a horrendous mother's online 'courting and dumping' was sensationalised as yet another demonic result of kids using social networking sites. What is not reported are the hundreds of millions of users who are not suffering but enjoying the private networking possibilities offered by these sites? Even government elections are using the sites as a means to court the favour and the votes of young people. This protectionist line is consistent with the reportage of the 'dumbing down,' of English with media at the expense of Shakespeare, which promulgates false fears of 'declining literacy standards.' As Ilana Snyder has recently revealed the reporters at the heart of the 'literacy wars,' cite themselves and each other and do not provide much substantive research evidence to support their claims of a literacy crisis.

Another theoretical position, that of the grammar of visual design (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), focuses on visual language as a social semiotic. This could be useful at the detailed level of creating and composing visual content in digital stories. As English teachers, we can extend our students' 'proximal development', to borrow a Vygostkyan term, by teaching them the fundamentals and letting them extend the frames of the texts and products they create. Kress also urges us to find creative ways to manipulate form to 'do things with texts (Kress, 2006), which is certainly within the brief of digital storytelling.

The fact is that many of our students are using computers and other media at home. Australia has a high rate of home computer ownership and high (if not high speed) access to the internet. The research undertaken on 'domestication,' that is home use of technology is one of

the most useful to us as English teachers. The theory of ‘domestication’ compromises between technical and social determinism. This approach:

> …looks at both the interactions between individuals and technologies and the political, social and cultural contexts in which the technologies are being defined and used. ...and that their adoption and use are dynamic and changing (Snyder, 2008, p. 162).

When this approach underpins research about technology and literacy, ‘the relationships **between teachers, students and the technologies** have all been examined as part of complex networks of interaction and learning’ (I. Snyder, 2008, p. 182). Embracing technology and its uses for literacy means we work in contexts that are relevant to our students’ ways of interacting with text. There is not much substantive evidence to describe the kinds of learning that occurs online domestically. Finding a research design that could measure this relationship between learning and technology could be quite difficult, since much of the learning involved in ‘produsage’ in domestic settings remains unobserved, although there is some (Silverstone & Hirsch, 1994). This has been answered in part by the work on participatory culture and learning by Mizuko Ito (Ito, 2008).

Curriculum directives

Recent Curriculum imperatives also urge us to take this approach to technology in English. The National Curriculum document, “Shape of the Australian Curriculum: English,” states:

6.4 The role of digital technologies

> Australians conduct their routine daily activities through a wide and complex range of oral and written language and images. Our sense of belonging to local, institutional, national, and, increasingly, virtual communities, and our ability to contribute meaningfully to those communities, increasingly depends on how well we communicate.
>
> Digital and online technologies continue to profoundly transform how members of Australian society work, meet, keep in touch, express themselves, share, build and store knowledge, and access material for pleasure and learning. Clearly, digital and online materials present the English curriculum with new teaching opportunities. Enhancing the access of all teachers and students to these resources is critical.(NCB, 2009)

The ‘new teaching opportunities’ referred to in this national document are important but they also miss the notion of authentic publication spaces, not just for accessing but for ‘expressing themselves’. Creating new texts using new media forms, is ‘critical’, argues this document. Earlier National policy statements also advocated the use of technology in the English curriculum. The draft national statements describing core curriculum elements for English/ Literacy suggest that students will need to master:

> ...the capacity to use information and communication technologies in the *construction of texts* and the capacity to *interpret and critically analyse* texts *created and published* through *information and communication technologies* {MCEETYA, 2005 #29}.

The italics here are mine. It seems clear from the plethora of digital forms available to us that creating and publishing using information technologies can easily go beyond the simple use of the word processor as an expensive typewriter.

To add a parochial note, the documents in Queensland also focus on learning. The word ‘design’ replaces ‘shape’ from the previous draft of the Queensland 1-10 English Syllabus. In the Queensland Curriculum and Reporting (QCAR) “Essential Learning” statements (QSA, 2007), the following descriptor for a year nine level ‘learning and assessment’ focus suggests:

> Students *select and use* a range of tools and technologies, including information and communication technologies (ICTs). They routinely demonstrate an autonomous and purposeful use of ICTs when *interpreting and constructing* texts (QSA, 2007).

The italics again, are mine. In terms of the ‘sub-strands,’ of *speaking and listening*, the QCAR framework suggests that, “Spoken texts have a range of structures and can be delivered in a number of mediums, *e.g. recorded speech on a DVD or in a radio play”*. It continues:

> ...in presentations, speakers make meaning clear by organising subject matter, and by selecting resources that support the role they have taken as the speaker and the relationship they wish to establish with the audience. E.g.: *a segment from a documentary is used to enhance a formal presentation* (QSA, 2007, p. 1).

Reading and viewing involve using a range of strategies to interpret, analyse and appreciate written, visual and multimodal texts across local, national and global contexts. For example:

> ...words, groups of words, *visual resources and images* can position an audience by presenting ideas and information and portraying people, characters, places, events and things in particular ways (QSA, 2007, p. 2).

Finally, *writing and designing* involve using language elements to construct literary and non-literary texts for audiences across local, national and global contexts. For example:

> ...words and phrases, symbols, images and audio affect meaning and establish and maintain roles and relationships to influence an audience. E.g.: *a PowerPoint presentation uses audio techniques to enhance the presentation and maintain audience interest* (QSA, 2007, p. 3).

QCAR is an assessment framework not a teaching one, however, if we are to assess these literacy events, it makes sense that we must also be effectively teaching students these 'essential learnings'. ICTs feature in all the Australian curriculum documents pertaining to English. We also know from *Literate Futures*, that for "new times," print media literacy is 'necessary but not sufficient' (Education Queensland, 2001). In English, essentially we are teaching language and text, and we therefore need to include digital texts, which exist in literary, aesthetic and non-literary or everyday forms. Most significantly, digital texts are texts which many of our students engage with daily.

What is digital storytelling?

Storytelling is important in every culture and as English teachers we have a special reserve on forms of narrative. If fact we could say that stories are our subject's lifeblood. So what can digital platforms offer us in terms of augmenting the ways we access, and create the stories we tell and the text types we cask students to access, respond to or create?

Digital storytelling refers to the short form of computer generated or recorded, orally narrated storytelling. Some digital stories are podcasts, which are purely audio based although they may be supported by still digital images. Others are combine narration, still images and music or sound track. Online communities house existing digital stories which can provide wonderful models for students' work.

So why would we do digital storytelling?

Apart from the participatory culture and technological and curriculum initiatives described above, digital storytelling is happening everywhere that digital technologies proliferate and

digital platforms provide exciting new forms for our students to use, it would be a shame not to be utilising these forms in our classrooms. Let's think about storytelling. If we were fortunate enough to be read to as children, from our earliest memories of picture books we associated illustrations with stories. As we became literate, we learned to visualise worlds captured by words. Even oral stories conjure up imagined pictures in the minds of the listener.

Digital stories are not just about reading, however, nor are they bound by the receptive senses, since they are essentially expressive. What is extremely interesting about digital stories, however, is that they can combine aural and visual modes with text thereby deploying not merely the left hemisphere of the brain which helps us decode language. 'Language function is processed predominantly in the left hemisphere of the brain, which receives visual information directly from the right visual field' (Harms, 2006). Digital storytelling uses both right and left hemispheres; the whole mind (Pink, 2005). Pink advocates the importance of 'high touch, high empathy and Right-brain-directed thinking,' for learners. He argues that right brain directed thinkers will be better prepared for the 'new age', since we are moving from the information age to the 'conceptual' one (Pink, 2005). Along with Pink, James Gee (Gee, 2003) in his work on video games and what they can teach us argued for the importance of conceptual 'design' in curriculum. They provide new composition and writing and designing opportunities for our students. These can be quite sophisticated textual forms with imagined adult audiences appear online and in mediated contexts. Kress also suggests that we need to focus on form, design and creativity to do things with texts (Kress, 1995).

Where to find digital stories

Digital stories occur everywhere that online communities and digital technologies are operating. One of the most fascinating is the podcasting venture 'Storybooth', which operates in New York (www.storycorps.net). Daniel Pink describes it as follows:

> For $10 an hour anyone can book into the booth and record a broadcast quality interview with someone (your ninety year old grandmother, zany uncle Ted, the mysterious guy down the street) whose story you're eager to hear and preserve (Pink, 2005, p. 118).

The 'Storybooth' community project produces broadcast quality audio recordings as podcasts. The range of storytellers represented is impressive. A young Afro-American girl

recounts the loss of her father and pays tribute to her surviving mother, and tough fire-fighters sensitively tell the story of a colleague who perished in the 9/11 disaster This site (Isay, 2003) provides excellent models for personal, aesthetic and critical response, deconstruction and teaching.

'Poetry slams' podcasts and vodcasts

We can also find examples of brilliant performance poetry online. The multiple winner of the national US poetry slam, Canadian performance poet, Shane Koyczan, can be viewed on *You Tube* (Koyczan, Shane http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8BoM4A_NZY&feature=related, Retrieved 3/5/2008). This inspirational poet provides an excellent model for teaching performance poetry. It would be quite possible to create a poetry slam in the classroom or across a whole year level and upload exemplary performances to 'Teacher Tube' or 'You Tube,' if the school's policy allows access to these sites. Alternatively a school intranet site could be used as a publication space. Slam poetry has many of the rhythmical qualities of rap without the music and can be designed to respond to various issues under study in other forms of literature and provide a possible text-type for oral assessment in English. There are Australian sites also where podcasts of slam poetry performances are uploaded although these are updated according to the year in which the slam is held and the sites do expire. Poetry Slams have been hosted by the State Library of NSW, the Sydney Festival, the Melbourne Writer's Festival, Queensland Poetry Festival, Woodford Folk Festival, at 'Openmouth' in Perth as well as on ABC radio and podcasts of some of these events are to be found online at those institutions' respective web sites. The library sites in particular are stable although constantly updated.

Creating digital stories: modelling and creating the form: applications in the classroom

Let me now describe in more detail a few of the forms, or digital text-types, that we can have our students engage with in English classes. Web 2.0, with its user-friendly programs, has certainly opened up numerous creative opportunities for publication and creation of literary and non-literary responses which lend themselves to English work. Our students can respond to literary and digital texts by 'constructing', 'designing' and 'shaping' new media texts. Making podcasts is relatively easy. Many software programs, including free downloadable software, allow our students to create these short forms of audio stories. One free downloadable, user- friendly software program is 'Audacity.' The software is relatively easy to master and can be used to record audio interviews with a recordable MP3 player with built

in microphone (Dezuanni & Jetnikoff, 2008). These can be uploaded to the school's intranet as a podcast or as part of a blog. Since these 'stories' mostly play between 3-5 minutes these could fit into units at various levels as short multimodal/ multimediated 'speeches,' or as poetry forms, especially at junior secondary levels. Longer narratives could be constructed for senior secondary work outside of exam conditions. Some proponents of digital stories maintain that brevity is part of the form and prefer two or three minute stories (Meadows, 2008), however, there is no hard and fast rule on this and Photo Stories can be longer without losing impact as long as the narrative structure has integrity.

Multimodal Digital life stories.

Students can also create multimodal digital narratives with still images, music and narration. These look like 'mini movies', and in particular lend themselves to autobiographical writing or life writing or narrative poetry composition. There are excellent examples of autobiographical stories online. We reputedly have the largest repository of digital stories in the world housed at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) in Melbourne. ACMI runs three day workshops to teach people how to make these digital stories, many of which can be sampled online. The State Library of Queensland also houses a repository of local digital 'Queensland stories' (photo stories) accessible through their web site. The online 'Centre for Digital Storytelling' hosts some quite sophisticated stories made by young people. This Californian site is a non-profit organisation which assists people to craft and share digital stories. They have a particular approach to the form of digital storytelling.

> Many individuals and communities have used the term "digital storytelling" to describe a wide variety of new media production practices. What best describes our approach is its emphasis on personal voice and facilitative teaching methods. Many of the stories made in our workshops are directly connected to the images collected in life's journey. But our primary concern is encouraging thoughtful and emotionally direct writing (http://www.storycenter.org/index1.html, para 2, retrieved 11/2/08).

This preamble on the 'Storycenter' site's homepage fosters a reader-response approach, by emphasising emotional impact. Such stories are the ones we often remember. This does not herald a return to 'reader response' however, as the uploaded digital stories are quite complex. They explore discourses of identity and hybridity, education, place, gender representations, and show critical examination of identity and visual representations. The site includes a useful 'how- to' digital stories manual listed under resources entitled, 'Digital

Storytelling Cookbook' (Lambert, 2006). This excellent manual covers detailed aspects of narrative conventions and plot lines, which I will not cover here. If you are thinking of doing digital storytelling with your students, I highly recommend using the online 'cookbook' (Lambert, 2006), which covers narrative structure and conventions and staring points for stories, although the guide's technical focus is designed for Macintosh users.

When we read printed or online text we engage in picturing and imagination, which involves finding, creating or responding to images. In digital stories, whilst processing verbal language, we also engage in implicit semiotic decoding. To read and interpret an audiovisual digital story we also decode the particular images or symbols inserted into the text at various points. Here I will describe one, although writing about it does not have the same impact as actually experiencing the text itself. We might read the image of Kaun Yin as the Chinese identification in the hybrid identity construction of the story, 'Mixed Race Me'(Y. T. Snyder, 2007), housed at the 'Center for Digital Storytelling' site. Kuan Yin, the Chinese Goddess of compassion is juxtaposed against the following image of a period poster depicting a muscle-bound working woman, with the spoken narration, 'feminist power cords guide the way... I believe in unladylike resistance and spray-can demands.' Throughout the story the visual symbols/ metaphors construct a particular reading of hybrid femineity, sometimes juxtaposing and sometimes complementing the narration. Yuni Tsao Snyder completes the story using a frame of white text on a black screen, 'I ended up by finding sacred the disorder of my spirit.' The digital story is spoken as poetry accompanied by still pictures, transitions, and music. In the window alongside the story is a written personal narrative reflection by the author:

> A stream of verbal and visual poetry characterize this meditation on questions of mixed-race heritage and how the constant dilemma of feeling neither/both affects one's sense of identity and place in the world (Y. T. Snyder, 2007).

Other stories on the same site explore notions of place and revisiting, where iron girders act as bones and provide potential discussion of semiotics; through the visual impact of pictures and choices of symbolism in relation to poetry. Such texts can serve as good models for our students.

How do we make these stories?

These kinds of digital stories combining narrative, images and soundtrack can be created using a free downloadable program, *Photo Story 3* for Windows. This program allows stories

to be told by combining words as text with pictures and symbols, with built-in music sound track and spoken narrative. I have used this in workshops with my students who, like me, found it very easy to learn. I taught myself very quickly, even though I am a digital 'traveller' not a native. My tertiary literature students learned the basics in one two-hour session and I have worked with teachers and taught them the basics in the same length of time. Step-by-step guides to constructing brief, 'life-writing' stories using this program are described in *Media Remix* (Dezuanni & Jetnikoff, 2008).

With the plethora of digital storytelling forms available to us, what does this mean for us as teachers and our students as readers and writers? Where do we begin to teach digital storytelling?

Teaching digital storytelling: the short, narrative digital form

I suggest we begin where we begin teaching any narrative text type. If you need help with these specifics, use the online Lambert (2006) text referred to earlier. What topic or discourse do we want our students to explore? For example, the discourse of personal identity has run through many of the texts discussed in this paper. As with any print based text, we could model various forms of digital stories using some of the myriad of online sources and sites available. These can serve as texts for deconstructing the form of the piece, the narrative structure, the textual features and the visual grammars and semiotics if the story is audio or audio-visual (Kress 2006).

Know what technologies you need and ask the IT department to assist with access to the technologies. There is a plethora of free ware which can be used. Once you have decided on the software and the necessary hardware, (USB drives and disks for storage and sharing, microphones / headphones and so forth) the students will need to gather resources, including visual images and sounds, if the students are making stories which include those dimensions. Drafting, designing and creating templates and scripts may include a speaking or written script or both. Finally, shape up the product or text, prepare it for assessment and then share it by saving to disk or uploading the product.

Share, Store, Remix, Reuse — Legally

Because images are hungry for space on computers, when teaching digital storytelling, students must be able to both access and store images so that projects can be worked on over a series of lessons. Certainly at schools we can monitor, filter and teach students responsible

ways of using the technologies to create products that have both critical and aesthetic qualities, and which do not infringe copyright. If there is one site that all teachers and students making digital stories (or any new media mash-ups) need to know about it would be the non-profit, Creative Commons site (http://creativecommons.org/). Creative Commons (CC) provides free tools, including software, sound effects, music remixes, images and other visual materials that let educators easily, 'mark their creative work with the freedoms they want it to carry'. Students can access some exciting resources for the creation of their stories. Often young people want to use music which is more current than the loops and sound tracks built in to *Photo Story 3*. Provided they follow the guidelines of the resources on the site, they can access some remixes which may be more appropriate to the tales they are telling. CC is also a potential publication space where students can upload their work and license it themselves, thus learning about copyright in the process. Users can use CC to change their copyright terms from, "All Rights Reserved" to "Some Rights Reserved". An important learning point can also be made about copyright, which in these days of digital piracy is often ignored by users.

Storing images and texts can be problematic if the students need to work and redraft their stories over several sessions in a lab. In fact there are a number of concerns I anticipate may be overcome by knowing where to turn for help. The following table may be useful to answer some anticipated troubleshooting questions for managing the technologies whilst teaching digital storytelling.

Managing the technologies for digital storytelling

Problem	**Solution**	**Source**
Where do I get access to digital resources?	Freeware CC	Download from Web and love your IT person
Visual and video images are space hungry- where can kids store them?	Use free sites to store images	Flickr/Picasa (with restricted access for security reasons)
How do I navigate through the software?	Use help menus, attend workshops, learn the basics, teach them to students and then ask the students	Get *Media Remix*

Other multimodal digital forms.

Other kinds of digital stories can be told as blogs and vlogs. Blogs began their life as online journals, and reports, but now include fictional texts, which can contain words, pictures, podcasts and / or vlogs (video logs). The blogosphere has been for some time a way of sourcing public opinion about major events and issues for huge media corporations such as CNN and the BBC.

> Re-placing somewhat outdated email lists and personal websites as vehicles for exchanging ideas and information, blogs represent for authors an opportunity to reach out and connect with an audience never before accessible to them, while maintaining control over their personal expressive spaces (Bruns, 2008, p. 5).

Blogs have now become publication sites for fiction as well. Blogs are usually written individually, and are relatively easy to access and create. There are many free sites available with ready-to-use templates and these take minutes to set up. These can provide useful online spaces for students to respond to fictional texts. Wikis are collaborative online texts which allow users who have editing rights to add content to the site. They act like collaboratively designed, simple web pages. In fact, a search online reveals that you can access a wiki, 'how to,' site which guides the reader procedurally from composing through to publishing fictional blogs http://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Fictional-Blog (retrieved 7/5/08). This site could be very useful for teachers of blogs. The wiki site advises readers to:

> 1. Find yourself a blog hosting site;
> 2. Choose a fictional world that will appeal to you and that you won't lose interest in;
> 3. Choose the right character;
> 4. Write out a story arc;
> 5. Find your market.

Certainly this wiki author (or perhaps there are multiple authors) has authentic publication spaces and audiences in mind.

Exciting possibilities: how can we ignore them?

There are so many exciting possibilities and textual forms afforded to us by new digital media that we cannot afford to ignore them. I'd like to emphasise the positives of what we

can offer to our students in this process. As English teachers we know about textual forms, narrative structures, storytelling text types and textual features. Many of us have also studied semiotics and have gained important knowledge about graphics and visual texts. We understand the intricacies of literature and have a cultural heritage to draw from. More traditional forms of literary text can and probably should serve as 'imagination springboards', models and stimuli for new media textual responses. As teachers of literature with life experience and knowledge of literature, we have a lot to offer to our techno savvy students. This knowledge, combined with the set of techno skills, visual reading skills and the imaginations our 'digital native' students bring with them, means that digital storytelling along with other new media forms can make exciting additions to our students' experiences in English.

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